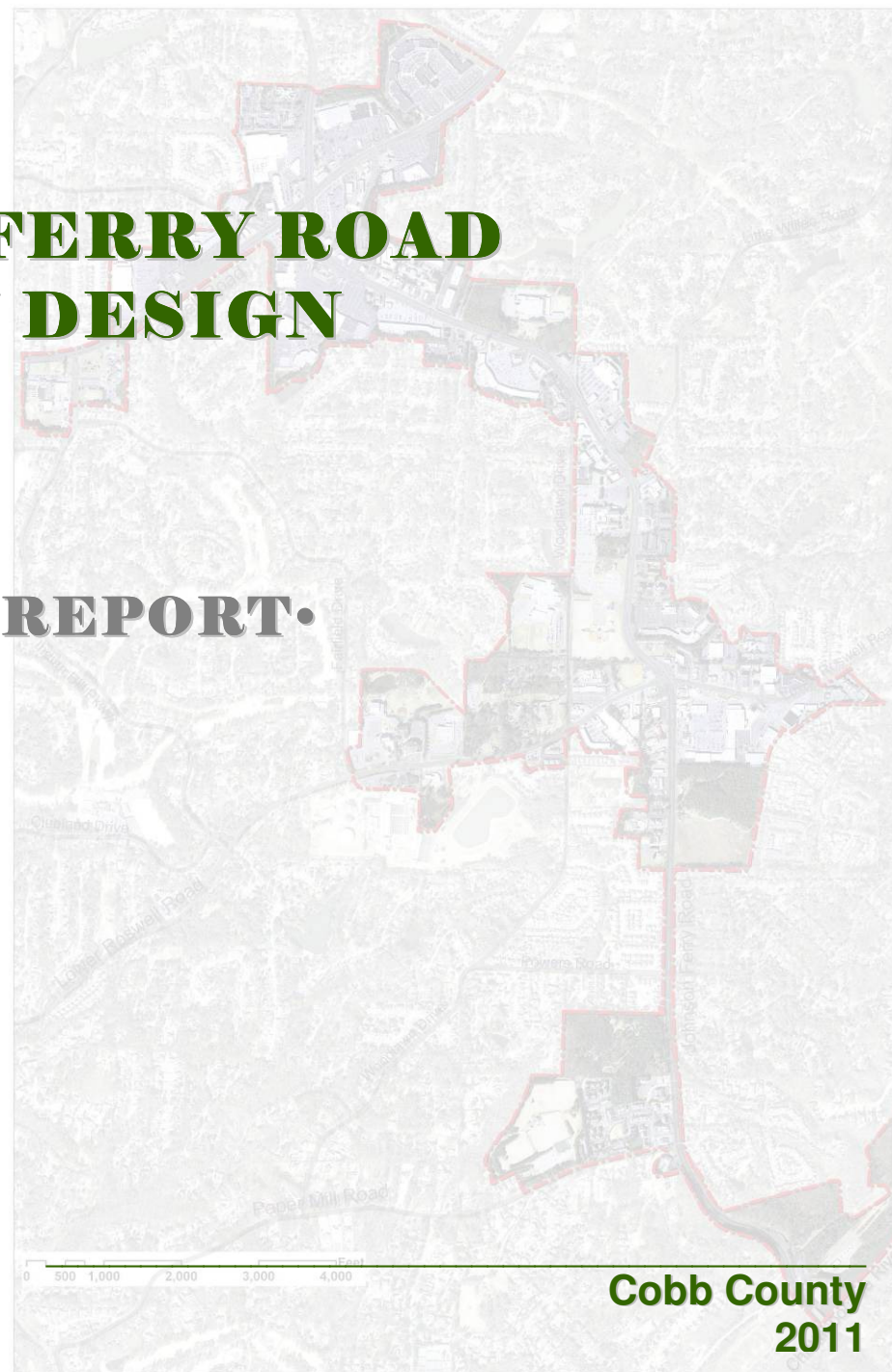


# **JOHNSON FERRY ROAD URBAN DESIGN**

## **•FINAL REPORT•**



*Cobb County...Expect the Best!*



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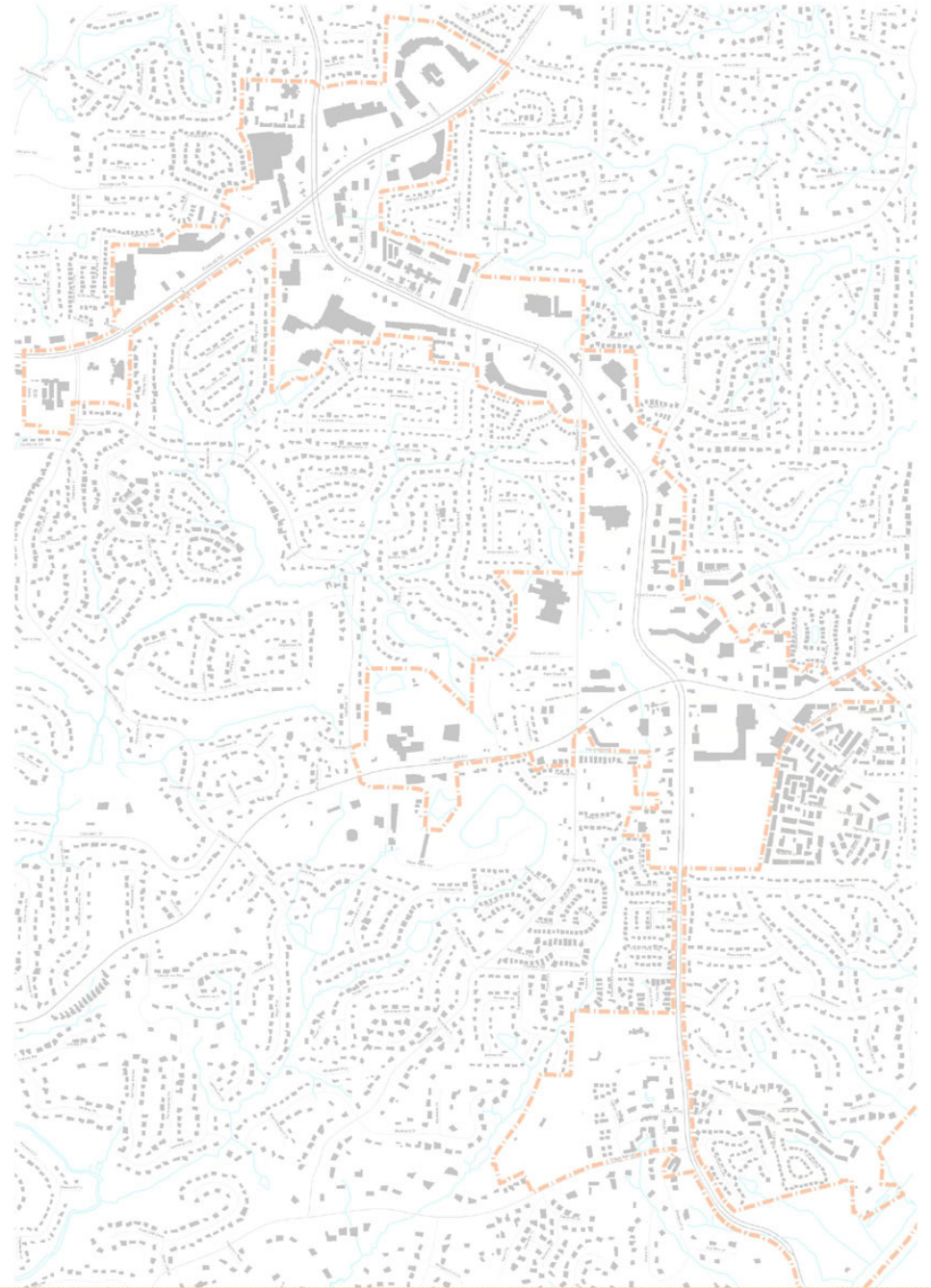
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## Section I: Introduction



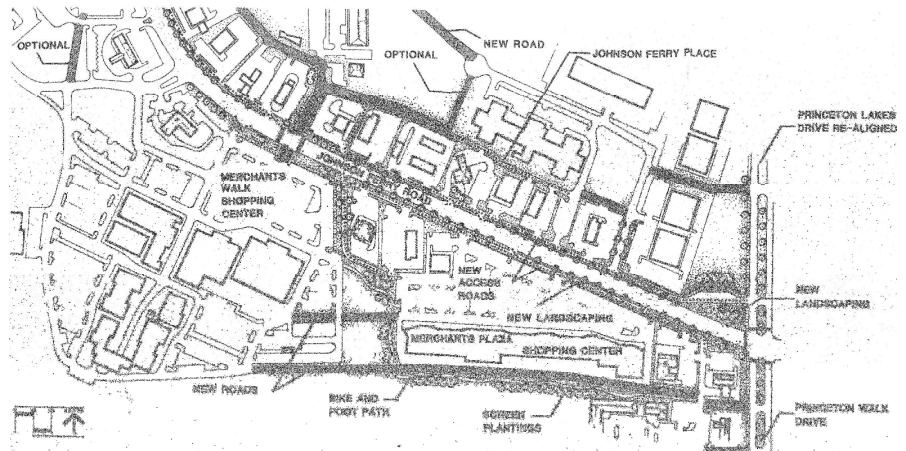


Johnson Ferry Road is the heart of East Cobb, a more affluent section of Cobb County that developed out in a suburban pattern during the late part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Johnson Ferry Road is an arterial roadway that carries vehicles from northeast Cobb and southern Cherokee County to the City of Sandy Springs, the Perimeter CID area, and I-285. A focus group was developed in 2009 represented by residential and commercial property owners along the corridor that helped provide clarity to the challenges and issues facing this part of the community through numerous vantage points. As a result of this focus group, Cobb County staff started developing an Urban Design Plan for the southern section of the Johnson Ferry Road corridor (From Roswell Road to Chattahoochee River). The intent of this Urban Design Plan is to consider challenges, assets, and possibilities within the Johnson Ferry Road corridor and develop a vision, street network plan, and a street section phasing design that will assist in improving the visual nature of the corridor while ensuring mobility for people via multiple modes of travel.

The task undertaken in the development of this plan includes a windshield survey and data analysis of existing conditions along the corridor; understanding the visual preferences and community design desires of the community; development of a visioning plan to guide future public and private investment; and development of a roadway design plan that will provide appropriate scenarios for retrofitting different segments of the corridor.

In order to better understand the corridor it is important to understand its history and meaning within the community. Early planning efforts began with a Johnson Ferry Road Corridor Study conducted by Robert And Company 1985. This study focused on traffic analysis for the entire corridor from Sandy Plains to the Chattahoochee River. As part of the findings and implementation strategy, road widening improvements were made. Johnson Ferry Road expanded to six lanes with a median. In addition, the plan proposed several improvements that are similar to those currently being considered in this urban design plan. Some recommendations of the 1985 plan include: (See Map 1)

- Recommended slip lane (access road) design in the Merchant Plaza Shopping Center area
- Proposed Inter-parcel access and perimeter link design in several shopping centers
- Realignment of Princeton Lakes with Princeton Walk to consolidate these two intersections
- Proposed a bicycle and pedestrian multi-use trail along Johnson Ferry Road
- Design landscaping on both side of Johnson Ferry Road



**Map 1**

### **Johnson Ferry Road History**

Johnson Ferry Road is named for William Marion Johnston, who operated a ferry across the Chattahoochee River beginning in the 1850s. Johnston, born in 1817, purchased 281 acres along the river in 1851. His property aligned what is now known as Johnson Ferry Road. Johnston constructed his home west of the road and it was still standing in the 1930s. Two of Johnston's sons joined the Confederate army. His eldest died at the Battle of Sharpsburg while the other survived after being held as a prisoner of war. Johnston died in 1879 and was survived by his third wife, Margrett. At the time of his death, Johnston retained 145 acres near the Chattahoochee River.

Johnson Ferry Road was likely in existence before the Civil War. It is noted as being used by Federal troops as they traveled from Marietta to the mills in Roswell. The road was not paved until after 1946, when in June of that year, Cobb voters passed a \$1.4 million bond referendum. The money would be used to pave over one hundred miles of roads in Cobb County, including Johnson Ferry Road. Johnson Ferry Road and the surrounding area remained rural well into the 1970s when the only store around was a country store and gas pump at the intersection of Lower Roswell Road and Johnson Ferry (See Map 2 which shows the aerial photo in 1972 and Map 3 presented the existing Condition). However, by the 1980s, Johnson Ferry was one of the most traffic congested roads in Cobb County. At some point, the "t" out of "Johnston" was dropped out of the name of the road. This appears to have happened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century when some records used "Johnston" and others used "Johnson." On the first official Cobb County map in 1913, the name "Johnson" is used. In 1987, Johnson Ferry Road was improved and widened from 4 lanes into 6 lanes by Cobb County Department of Transportation.



**Map 2**



**Map 3**



**Johnson Ferry Road History (Continued)**

The photo 1 below depicts the flooded Johnson Ferry Road bridge over the Chattahoochee River in 1946. The history associated with this bridge worthy of mentioning is a flooding in that year causing significant damage to the bridge. Cobb County paved several miles of roads including Johnson Ferry Road in that year. Also, the bridge was operated as one-lane two-way traffic, resulting in the first come first go maneuver as found at a two way stop sign intersection. Today, the bridge is currently four-lane two-way traffic and under a road widening construction project. (See Photo 2)



**Photo 1**



**Photo 2**

The remainder of this study document will assist the reader in understanding the foundation for the creation of the roadway design scenarios and the vision that has been created for the corridor, and the action plan that will assist in making the vision a reality.

**What is Urban Design**

Urban design deals primarily with the design and management of public space (i.e. the 'public environment', 'public realm' or 'public domain'), and the way public places are experienced and used. Public space includes the totality of spaces used freely on a day-to-day basis by the general public, such as streets, plazas, parks and public infrastructure. Some aspects of privately owned spaces, such as building facades or domestic gardens, also contribute to public space and are therefore also considered by urban design.

While the two fields are closely related, 'urban design' differs from 'urban planning' in its focus on physical improvement of the public environment, whereas the latter tends, in practice, to focus on the management of private development through established planning methods and programs, and other statutory development controls.

### **Urban Design Principles**

Public spaces are frequently subject to overlapping management responsibilities of multiple public agencies or authorities and the interests of nearby property owners, as well as the requirements of multiple and sometimes competing users. The design, construction and management of public spaces therefore typically demands consultation and negotiation across a variety of spheres. Urban designers rarely have the degree of artistic liberty or control sometimes offered in design professions such as architecture. It also typically requires interdisciplinary input with balanced representation of multiple fields including engineering, ecology, local history, and transportation planning.

Urban design may encompass the preparation of design guidelines and regulatory frameworks, or even legislation to control development, advertising, etc. and in this sense overlaps with urban planning. It may encompass the design of particular spaces and structures and in this sense overlaps with architecture, landscape architecture, highway engineering and industrial design. It may also deal with 'place management' to guide and assist the use and maintenance of urban areas and public spaces. Urban design considers:

- *Character and meaning* – Recognizing and valuing the differences between one place and another
- *Urban structure* – How a place is put together and how its parts relate to each other
- *Function and fit* – Shaping places to support their varied intended uses
- *Complementary mixed uses* – Locating activities to allow constructive interaction between them
- *Animation* – Designing places to stimulate public activity
- *Accessibility* – Providing for ease, safety and choice when moving to and through places
- *Legibility and wayfinding* – Helping people to find their way around and understand how a place works
- *Urban typology, density and sustainability* - spatial types and morphologies related to intensity of use, consumption of resources and production and maintenance of viable communities
- *Order and incident* – Balancing consistency and variety in the urban environment in the interests of appreciating both
- *Continuity and change* – Locating people in time and place, including respect for heritage and support for contemporary culture
- *Civil society* – Making places where people are free to encounter each other as civic equals, an important component in building social capital

## **The Planning Process**

In February of 2010, the Board of Commissioner authorized the Community Development Agency to develop the Johnson Ferry Urban Design Plan as a result of growing concerns for this major commercial and residential corridor. The main goal of the plan is to improve the visual aesthetics and the quality of life along the corridor while maintaining its unique character. The Community Development Agency convened a Steering Committee of business owners and residents to work with staff on a design plan. The plan is a mid to long range plan that addresses land use, street environment and transportation.

Prior to each public meeting, the Steering Committee met to discuss issues facing Johnson Ferry Road, prepare a concept plan and develop draft design alternatives. Staff conducted a visioning charrette and Image Preference Survey at the second public meeting held on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010. More than 130 community members attended the public charrette. In addition to the group discussion at the charrette, more than 100 participants completed the survey. Staff on behalf of the Steering Committee presented the findings and recommendations during the third public meeting held at the East Cobb Library on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010. More than 80 community members attended. Overall, public respondents believed the proposed design plan and alternatives would:

### Community Aesthetics and Design:

- *Develop Corridor Identity*
- *Beautify the Streetscape*
- *Create Community Gathering Spaces (activity nodes)*

### Complete Transportation System:

- *Emphasize Multi-modal Safety*
- *Enhance Connectivity*
- *Improve Access Management*
- *Improve Connection to the River*

### Land Uses and Business Activity:

- *Envision Business Diversity*
- *Enhance Recreation Opportunities*

Several people expressed concerns associated with uncertainty about new street designs. These concerns included the impact on existing businesses, the possibility of incorporating different aspects of each design alternative into one overarching concept, and the total future cost of making the recommended improvement.

Based on the feedback from the public meeting, the Steering committee recommended several changes to the proposed design plan. County planning staff also met with CDOT and County Landscape Architects to discuss changes. This document reflects the recommended changes from public input, steering committee and county departments.